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ABSTRACT

Using a qualitative approach, documents were reviewed and teachers, peer evaluators, instructional supervisors, and administrators were interviewed in order to evaluate the effectiveness of peer evaluation programs in three school districts. Specifically, this study examines peer involvement in the summative evaluation of teachers in three school districts: Sunnyside School District (California); Oceanview School District (New York); and Midtown Public Schools, an urban system in a large, midwestern city. The districts differed in size, socioeconomic status and length of involvement with a peer evaluation program, but all three gave high ratings to their own peer evaluation program. While one district used peer evaluation only at the secondary level, another focused on teacher remediation. The third district had a mandatory Teacher Development Program including a model career ladder, and peer evaluation for all new teachers. Three themes emerged as critically important in all three districts: professional involvement; collegial relationships; and blending of bureaucratic and professional authority. It was concluded that: (1) teacher involvement was beneficial in securing teacher commitment and in maximizing both teacher observation time and sources of expertise within a district; (2) decisions about the extent and form of peer evaluation should be made at the school district level; (3) teachers can be very effective peer evaluators, despite feelings of role conflict; and (4) combining teachers' and administrators' authority can provide checks and balances to the evaluation procedure and improve the validity of the results. (JGL)

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VARIATIONS ON A THEME: AN ANALYSIS OF PEER INVOLVEMENT IN TEACHER EVALUATION

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I am grateful to Professor Milbrey McLaughlin for her support and guidance throughout this project.

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ABSTRACT

Calls to professionalize teaching turn on the ability of policy makers to increase peer involvement in the setting of professional standards for teachers and in the monitoring of individual practitioners. Yet few models of peer involvement in teacher evaluation exist at the elementary and secondary level. This study examines peer involvement in the summative evaluation of teachers in three school districts in an effort to explore critical issues in this underdeveloped field.

This research is exploratory in nature. A qualitative methodology was employed to construct three case studies. Document inspection was combined with a semi-structured elite interview format to provide the data. Data were collected and analyzed according to qualitative research guidelines discussed in Yin, (1984), and Miles and Huberman (1984).

Three critical issues emerged. Extensive teacher involvement in both the design and the implementation of any peer evaluation system symbolizes teachers' professional status and secures commitment. Teacher involvement maximizes the sources of expertise within a district.

Existing collegial relations among teachers must be seen as a starting point for planning peer involvement in the evaluation process. Districts must make strategic decisions regarding the extent and form of peer involvement based on past experience.

Blending bureaucratic and professional conceptions of authority and control within a school district is necessary if valid summative judgments are to result. Professional and bureaucratic controls can serve as a check and a balance that enables teachers to trust the validity of the personnel decisions that result.

As the educational reform movement of the 80's matures, calls for the increased involvement of teachers as architects of reform proposals proliferate (Carnegie Commission, 1986; National Governors Association, 1986). As this call to professionalize the occupation of teaching gains legitimacy, attention increasingly turns to peer involvement in the evaluation of teachers--in both the setting of professional standards and in the monitoring of competent practice. Peer review techniques, though the norm in higher education, have rarely survived for extended periods of time within elementary and secondary schools. Yet hopes of professionalizing teaching turn on the ability of policy makers to increase the use of peer review as an evaluation tool at the elementary and secondary level (Darling-Hammond, 1986).

This paper explores the involvement of classroom teachers in the evaluation of their peers in three school districts (pseudonyms are used to preserve the anonymity of respondents). The lack of experimentation in the area of peer review at the elementary and secondary level has severely limited past research. The three case studies presented here attempt to illuminate what has been, to this point a set of issues void of empirical study (see Wise et al, 1984; McLaughlin & Pfeifer, forthcoming, for two notable exceptions).

I first clarify the terminology employed in this study, and discuss the conceptual framework that guided data collection and analysis. After a brief discussion of the methodology, the teacher evaluation systems are described. I discuss critical

issues addressed by the three districts in section IV, and present implications for policy and practice in the final section.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

What is peer evaluation? The diversity of possibilities labeled peer review creates confusion about the term. Programs can vary in such fundamental features as purpose, goals, criteria, procedures, and the extent of teacher involvement. The one area of commonality is the involvement of practicing teachers in some manner in rendering a judgment regarding the performance of a peer. The three case studies I explore conform to this broad definition of peer evaluation. In addition, evaluation, as defined here, refers to summative evaluation--evaluations designed to influence the employment status (retention, dismissal, promotion, or salary level) of a teacher. Though the teacher evaluation systems in the three sample districts in this study also address the goal of improving classroom instruction, the summative aspect of evaluation is the primary focus of this investigation.

Even such a broad definition of peer evaluation does not expose the complex authority relationships that typically characterize public schools. Teachers represent a classic example of "professionals within a bureaucracy" as described by Lortie (1969). Thus, teachers subordinate themselves to the bureaucratic authority of the school board and its administrators in specific areas of building and district policy (e.g., general curricular guidelines, time schedules), yet teachers also command

the freedom to exercise remarkable professional discretion over classroom affairs (e.g., daily content decisions, choice of pedagogical methods). Theorists have described this seemingly unstable arrangement as a "loosely coupled system" that tolerates ambiguity and change as the status quo (Weick, 1976).

Much inquiry into the organization of teaching attempts to define and classify specific areas of administrative and professional control (Peterson, 1984; Lortie, 1969). Implicit in such analyses is a conception of organizational control that depicts professionalization and bureaucratization as competing processes (Bidwell, 1965). More recent work, however, views bureaucratization and professionalization as companion processes--the rise of professionalization supports the construction of new forms of organization that blends traditional sources of control (Scott, 1984; Larson, 1977; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

The emergence of peer evaluation techniques in teaching illustrates the trend toward new forms of organizing teaching work. But any policy of peer evaluation will necessarily involve tampering with the authority relationships within a school district. Teachers' relation to administrators, and teachers' relationships with other teachers will change when peers evaluate one another. Serious questions emerge when peer evaluation becomes a reality. Does a teacher remain a peer when a school district empowers him/her to render a judgment regarding the quality of the performance of a fellow teacher? Who sets the criteria and standards utilized in making such judgments? To

what extent will collegial relationships be altered by peer evaluation? How will building administrators react to what may be perceived as a loss of authority? Exploring these issues guided data collection and analysis.

METHODOLOGY

Given the paucity of research regarding peer evaluation at the elementary/secondary level, a qualitative research methodology involving case studies of three school districts was employed. Nominations of school districts to be included in this study came from state education agency personnel and researchers in the field. The three districts chosen offer variation in size, socio-economic level, model of peer evaluation employed, and duration of the peer evaluation experience. Given the exploratory nature of the study, maximum variation on these variables offered the possibility of generating a broad range of hypotheses that could be tested in later research.

In each district, I began by contacting the central office staff member with major responsibility for teacher evaluation and secured documentation pertaining to school district personnel and teacher evaluation policies. Relevant record data included goal and policy statements pertaining to evaluation and staff development, evaluation instruments and manuals, collective bargaining agreements, training materials, and samples of completed evaluation reports.

After reviewing this information, I spent from one to three weeks interviewing the superintendent, the director of personnel, senior administrators in the central office, and other central

office staff concerned with teacher evaluation. I also interviewed officers of the local teachers' organizations.

The varying size of each district produced different strategies for sampling teachers and administrators at the school site level. In the two smaller districts, at least two administrators, six teachers, and two peer evaluators were interviewed at every secondary school. The principal, two teachers, and one peer evaluator were interviewed in three of the district's elementary schools chosen by the superintendent to represent maximum variation in the implementation of district evaluation policy. The principal in each school was asked to recommend teacher respondents who would represent a range of experience with the evaluation system--highly effective teachers, average teachers, and less than effective teachers as rated on evaluation instruments.[1] In the third district--a large urban district--I visited 4 high schools, 4 junior highs, and 5 elementary schools of differing neighborhood type and degree of implementation of the peer evaluation program. In all, I spoke with 8 building level administrators, 10 central office personnel, and 24 teachers in Midtown.[2]

A semi-structured, elite interview format was employed during data collection. From central office personnel, I obtained a formal description of the teacher evaluation policy, how it had been developed, and the motivation for adopting a particular design. They provided statistics regarding the number and nature of personnel actions which directly resulted from the teacher evaluation process. I also sought information regarding the community's political context, the district's management

style, and the way in which evaluation was coordinated with other district management activities. From building level administrators, I sought information regarding how the formal evaluation policy was implemented, what resources they had at their disposal to support teacher evaluation at their school, and how peer evaluation affected their ability to attain instructional and other school goals.

From teachers, I sought an understanding of the role peer evaluation played in their day-to-day life, its impact on their own sense of satisfaction and efficacy, and the general manner with which district evaluation policy influenced collegial relationships. Peer evaluators described their role, and recounted various experiences, both positive and negative, in their role as a teacher evaluator. Teachers' organization officials provided information regarding the history of labor-management relations in the district, their role in developing the current evaluation system, and their perceptions of its fairness, reliability, and validity. Table One summarizes the number of interviews by role along with demographic data for the three sample districts.

TABLE ONE--Demographic Information and Interview Totals for Sample Districts

	OCEANVIEW	SUNNYSIDE	MIDTOWN
Student Population	8,200	13,000	72,000
Number of Schools	14	20	102
Number of Teachers	427	611	500
Description	Suburban	Suburban	Urban
SES	High	Mixed	Mixed
Duration of Peer Involvement	8 years	9 years	1 year
Total Number of Interviews	42	47	42
Number of Teachers Interviewed	22	27	21
Number of Peer Evaluators "	9	4	6
Number of Building Admin. "	5	10	8
Number of District Admin. "	6	6	7

[1] Note: This district employs 4,000 teachers. However, in the first year of implementation of the Teacher Development program, only 500 teachers participated in the new evaluation procedures.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data were collected and analyzed according to qualitative research guidelines discussed in Yin (1982), and Miles and Huberman (1984), and according to specific guidelines for grounded theory research and constant comparative analysis as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Data for the three sites was first read and issue coded. Data reduction generated an initial list of five issues which were displayed in a role ordered matrix (individual by theme, grouped by role--see Miles and Huberman, 1984). Patterns were then compared to literature on teacher evaluation (Wise et al, 1984; Bridges, 1986; McLaughlin & Pfeifer, forthcoming), collegial relationships (Little, 1982; Little and Bird, 1986), and school authority

relations (Lortie, 1969; 1975; Peterson, 1984; Bidwell, 1965). This process produced the major themes discussed in this paper. Triangulation of methods and sources was carefully followed to provide multiple sources of evidence for the study (Yin, 1984).

An additional validity check of all findings was obtained by asking one teacher, one central office administrator, and the president of the local teachers' association in each district to review and critique the case study that emerged from their district. These individuals confirmed the validity of the data, and agreed with the presentation format. All reviewers suggested that additional descriptive data be included to clarify various points. Below, synopses of the three case studies are provided.

THREE DISTRICTS IN BRIEF

The three districts discussed below vary in size, resources, management styles, and past teacher evaluation practices. They differ considerably in the model of peer evaluation employed, and the length of time peer involvement in the evaluation process has taken place. All three districts, however, have made a commitment to peer involvement in some aspect of the teacher evaluation process. Each district receives overwhelming support from both teachers and administrators for the existing peer component. Each district has also achieved some success in using peer involvement in making difficult personnel decisions involving less than effective teachers.

SUNNYSIDE SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Sunnyside School District, composed of approximately 13,000 students in 20 schools, lies in the heart of a middle class community in southern California. The district's enrollment has declined steadily over the past decade, necessitating 15 school closures and two major district reorganizations. Despite this turbulent past, the district is fiscally healthy and shares a positive working relationship with community members and the local teachers' association.

Most Sunnyside teachers experience an evaluation process similar to that found in most California school districts. Tenured teachers are evaluated once every two years based on a set of district-wide criteria mutually developed and continually revised by a committee of teachers and administrators. In addition, teachers submit a set of individual objectives every two years to serve as another basis for evaluative judgments. Evaluative decisions are made by building administrators based on a series of classroom observations.

Beyond this basic framework, however, Sunnyside has modeled its teacher evaluation system after that developed in the Salt Lake City Public Schools (See Wise, et al, op. cit. for a description of the Salt Lake City strategy). The backbone of the evaluation system is a peer remediation process to which principals may assign teachers they judge to be performing inadequately. To be referred for formal remediation, a teacher must receive a less than satisfactory rating for one year, and their principal must demonstrate that they have provided

appropriate assistance at the school site.

Over a decade ago, teachers and administrators committed themselves to installing an evaluation system for the Sunnyside professional staff that was based on peer assistance. At that time, a joint committee set out on a two year planning process with the expressed goal of modeling the evaluation process after that found in Salt Lake. Teachers had extensive involvement in the planning process. In fact, a teacher chaired the committee. Teachers perceived their involvement as an opportunity to exercise control over their own ranks and refocus the district's recently constructed evaluation system toward a philosophy of assistance and support. They felt that remediation teams composed of teachers represented the best way to insure that evaluation retained a positive and supportive focus.

If referred for formal remediation, the teacher and the Assistant Superintendent for Personnel mutually select two or three teachers who comprise a remediation team. These individuals have access to any district resources they deem necessary to assist them in supervising the teacher, including workshops, training materials, and substitute days for observation and conferencing. Strict confidentiality is maintained. At the end of the 60 day remediation period, the team recommends the teacher's continued employment or dismissal.

Over the past decade, 26 individuals have undergone formal remediation. At the end of the process, one-half of them elected to resign; one-half continued successfully in the classroom. Teachers (including union officials) and administrators alike express unanimous support for the peer remediation program.

Attention to formal remediation by building administrators, however, has waned recently; only one teacher has been referred for remediation over the past two years. The amount of time devoted to evaluation activity varies considerably from school to school. More pressing concerns over the past several years--declining enrollments, fiscal retrenchment, district reorganizations, and curricular reform--have become active priorities that have demanded explicit administrative attention that was once focused on evaluation. The superintendent has publicly committed himself recently to personally reviewing evaluation reports in the coming year in an effort to once again make teacher evaluation and peer remediation an active priority in Sunnyside.

In summary, three aspects of Sunnyside's peer remediation program appear critical to its lasting acceptance by teachers and its usefulness in addressing incompetence:

1) Initial and ongoing teacher involvement in crafting and revising the entire process. Teachers view formal remediation as a professional activity.

2) Though teachers are granted formal authority as remediators in recommending dismissal or further employment, they share this authority with administrators; only administrators can refer a teacher to the remediation program. This sharing of power and control serves as a check and a balance that maintains trust in the process.

3) The focus of the peer remediation process is positive. Assistance and support of professionals by professionals, backed by extensive district resources, cements teacher commitment.

OCEANVIEW SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Oceanview School District serves an extremely affluent community outside New York City. Since enrollment peaked at 15,000 in the late 60's, subsequent declines have forced school closures. In 1984-85, 8,200 students were taught in 11 elementary schools, one middle school, and two high schools by a professional staff of 427.

A highly educated community with high expectations for its schools forms the backdrop for the teacher evaluation system in Oceanview. Teachers' attitudes mirror the community they serve. Many teachers speak with pride regarding the professional autonomy they possess, and most feel relatively unfettered by bureaucratic requirements. Not surprisingly, this conception of teachers as autonomous professionals influenced the development of the teacher evaluation system.

The basic form of the evaluation system is once again not unlike that found in surrounding school districts. Tenured teachers are evaluated once every two years based on a set of criteria mutually developed and continually revised by a committee of teachers and administrators. Teachers also annually submit a set of objectives on which evaluative judgments are based. The final summative evaluation is a narrative document that highlights both strengths and weaknesses based on classroom observations. Teachers earn a rating of Satisfactory, Needs Improvement, or Unsatisfactory based on supporting evidence.

At all elementary schools, evaluating teachers is the responsibility of the principal--no peer involvement exists.

However, at the secondary level, teachers are evaluated not by the principal, but by teachers given the title of "instructional supervisors" who also perform other administrative tasks such as curriculum development, budgeting, and scheduling. They receive two periods of released time plus a small stipend that varies with department size. Each instructional supervisor teaches a minimum of three classes.

The Oceanview Educators Association (OEA) and the board of education negotiated this arrangement with the onset of collective bargaining almost a decade ago. Instructional supervisors remain members of the teachers' collective bargaining unit. Both state and national teachers' associations object to such an arrangement. However, OEA remains committed to this variation of peer evaluation as a matter of professional preference. According to the president of OEA:

> Teachers prefer to be evaluated by peers who are knowledgeable about the curriculum....They prefer to be evaluated by someone who's close to the teaching process.

Although at times some tension has emerged because peers evaluated peers, not one respondent expressed a desire to do away with the practice of evaluation by instructional supervisors.

Most evaluation narratives written by instructional supervisors looked alike in the early years of their involvement as evaluators. However, in recent years, the formation of an Evaluation Management Committee composed of the superintendent and his three assistant superintendents has produced some dramatic changes. This committee meets twice each year with every principal and instructional supervisor to review evaluation narratives. Instructional supervisors must now rigorously justify

the statements they make about teachers' strengths and weaknesses. Evaluators are held strictly accountable for the quality of their evaluations.

Not surprisingly, in the past several years, evaluations no longer look alike according to board members who annually review them. In addition, at least 10 teachers each year have received a rating of Needs Improvement over the last 5 years. A total of 9 teachers have voluntarily resigned their position based on negative evaluative feedback.

In summary, the following aspects of the Oceanview evaluation experience are critical in understanding its lasting acceptance by teachers and its ability to address incompetence:

1) Both district management and the teachers' association participated in the development of the system and remain committed to it.

2) A conscious decision was made initially to limit peer evaluation to secondary schools. Since no position similar to instructional supervisor has ever existed at the elementary level, teachers as well as administrators do not believe the model is workable there.

3) Instructional supervisors appear to be reluctant to rate teachers as unsatisfactory unless top management holds them accountable for high quality evaluations. The combination of administrative and professional involvement in the evaluation process was necessary to produce evaluation narratives that both parties agree accurately reflect teacher performance.

4) Because instructional supervisors work side by side with the teachers they evaluate, and because they share a teacher's curricular knowledge, evaluations are judged by teachers to be more valid and reliable.

MIDTOWN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Midtown Public Schools, a large, urban system, serves approximately 72,000 students who live in a large, midwestern city. Midtown has achieved national prominence for its commitment to staff development training, and these efforts culminated in the design and implementation of a model career ladder program for teachers entitled "The Teacher Development Program." Teacher Development incorporates staff development and teacher evaluation in a comprehensive program of professional growth, career advancement, and incentive pay designed to both attract and retain effective teachers. This case study focuses on the 500 participants in the Teacher Development program only. The remaining 3500 teachers in the district are evaluated by traditional means without any peer involvement.

Impending action by the state legislature on a state-wide merit pay plan for teachers prompted the Midtown superintendent to charge a committee of local teachers, administrators, parents, and business leaders to investigate the concept and its implications at the local level. Convinced that merit pay, as currently conceived, would be detrimental to Midtown teachers and students, the committee, under the leadership of a professor of education at a local university, recommended the development of a comprehensive plan for professional growth that incorporated career stages of increasing responsibility, rigorous performance evaluation, and incentive pay, and that would draw upon the district's demonstrated commitment to staff development. The major innovation in the proposed Teacher Development program involved a unique approach to evaluation in which peers played a

central role. A steering committee composed of teachers, administrators, and union officials thus began a year-long process of soliciting teacher and community input and support for a radical redesign of professional responsibility in Midtown.

Participation in the Teacher Development Program is voluntary for experienced teachers, but all new recruits must join. New teachers are referred to as provisional teachers, and those experienced volunteers chosen to participate in the first year are known as Teacher Candidates. Evaluating the teacher's performance is the primary responsibility of a school based committee called an advisory/evaluation team, composed of the principal, the assistant principal for instruction (API)[3], and a fellow teacher. For provisional teachers, the fellow teacher is assigned, acting as a mentor. These individuals meet periodically with the teachers, help them to construct a program of professional improvement, called an Focused Growth Plan, and broker available staff development resources to support them in achieving this plan. The advisory/evaluation team also conducts periodic formal and informal observations of the teacher's classroom performance, using the State Teaching Performance Assessment Scale (STPAS) as the basic observation tool. At the end of each semester, the advisory/evaluation team reviews data collected to document the teacher's performance, and arrives at a summative rating.

This is only a partial picture, however, because a basic principle undergirding the evaluation system is that reliability only results when multiple evaluations are conducted by numerous individuals employing multiple and explicit criteria over a long

period of time. Thus, two additional components of evaluation remain. First, the district employs 9 specially trained, system-wide **observer-assessors** who conduct both announced and unannounced classroom observations employing the STPAS. These individuals are recruited from the ranks of classroom teachers, and they may serve no longer than two years as observer-assessors. They pass their data on to the school-based advisory/evaluation team, serving as an external "validity and reliability check" of their deliberations.

Finally, the summative judgments of a teacher's competence produced by the advisory/evaluation teams are subject to the review and confirmation of both regional and district-wide committees composed of teachers and administrators before advancement along the career ladder is granted.

Supporting Teacher Development is now the focus of district staff development efforts. Provisional teachers receive training in classroom management skills and the elements of effective lesson design. Teacher Candidates receive training tailored to the content of their Focused Growth Plan. Released time is granted to mentors and provisional teachers to enable them to plan and discuss areas of need.

Midtown's Teacher Development Program has only been operational for one year, thus, it is difficult to assess its long-run impact. Standards for advancement, however, appear to be high. Of 150 Teacher Candidates nominated by their peers as outstanding teachers, only 137 were advanced to Career Level I status, with the remaining 13 either choosing to drop out of the

program or participate for another year. Approximately 86 of the district's 350 first year provisional teachers have voluntarily resigned, and the director of Teacher Development estimates that approximately 21 (6%) of all provisional teachers resigned primarily because of negative feedback generated by the evaluation system.

In summary, the following aspects of Midtown's evaluation process appear to be critical in understanding its initial acceptance by teachers and its ability to address the problems of accurately assessing both poor and excellent teaching through peer involvement in the evaluation process:

1) Teachers were full partners in the planning and implementation of the entire process.

2) Only new recruits, and volunteers from the ranks of experienced teachers must participate in the peer evaluation process.

3) Practicing teachers fill a variety of roles in the evaluation process, none of which place the sole responsibility for making final evaluative judgments on one individual. Elaborate checks and balances involving both teachers and administrators seek to maintain trust in the process.

4) District resources are mobilized to assist teachers in the evaluation process. Thus, the focus of evaluation remains a developmental one.

CRITICAL ISSUES

Data analysis produced three themes which unified the experience of the three school districts. Each specific context illustrated the criticality of professional involvement, collegial relationships, and blending bureaucratic and professional authority. Evidence supporting the importance of these issues is presented below.

PROFESSIONAL INVOLVEMENT

The critical nature of teacher involvement in crafting and implementing a workable teacher evaluation system of any stripe has been documented frequently (Wise et al, op.cit.; McLaughlin & Pfeifer, op. cit.; Stiggins & Bridgeford, 1984). The experience of the three districts in this study underscores this finding, and suggests that teacher involvement serves several key functions when installing a peer evaluation system.

Because teachers are frequently regarded as "semi-professionals" (Etzioni, 1969), teacher involvement in both the setting of evaluative standards and in the implementing of evaluative procedures takes on symbolic importance. Darling-Hammond captures the significance of peer involvement for teachers when she states:

> Peer review, broadly defined, includes the various means by which professionals determine the content and structure of their work as well as the qualifications necessary for individuals to claim membership in the profession. It includes peer control over decisions that define acceptable practice as well as peer assessment of individual practitioners (Darling-Hammond, op.cit.).

Extensive peer involvement in the planning and implementation of the evaluation process occurred in each of the sample school districts. The data suggest that it is unlikely that top management could successfully install a peer evaluation system without substantial teacher involvement. Thus, numerous respondents pointed to its importance. In Sunnyside, a teacher on the evaluation planning committee described teachers' central role in opting for a peer remediation program:

> There was just a felt need among teachers to improve evaluation in the district. It became clear to us that if you were going to do a first class job with evaluation, teachers had to be involved...It was sort of a professional thing among teachers....we just felt that we wanted to police our own ranks.

Teachers in this district saw peer involvement in evaluation as a way to deal with "principals who didn't have the tools to recognize good or bad teaching," thus making evaluation "a farce." As one teacher stated:

> Peer remediation is important to me. It's important that it be positive, and I think it's necessary to have remediation if evaluation is going to be honest and perceived as fair... Poor teaching makes all of us in the profession look bad; remediation is a policy of cleaning your own house in a professional manner.

Though many teachers within the district have had no direct experience with the remediation process due to the confidentiality with which it is handled, every respondent felt that it was an important part of the district's evaluation system.

Teachers in Oceanview also had extensive involvement in the design and implementation of the evaluation process. In fact, the role of instructional supervisors as peer evaluators at the secondary level was actually negotiated between the district and the teachers' association against the advice of state and national professional associations. Many teachers in Oceanview speak with pride regarding the professional autonomy they enjoy as a result. A second year teacher at one school stated:

> You know, I feel almost self employed sometimes. I'm so autonomous. It's important to me not to have to feel like I must get an OK for everything I do.

Several respondents in Midtown singled out teacher involvement as the most important reason why "things are so good in Midtown." Given Midtown's size, securing input from all

teachers was a monstrous task. During the planning year for the Teacher Development program, the district secured a grant allowing it to hire seven full-time liaison teachers who actively canvassed all schools on a regular basis, seeking input and updating teachers on the progress of the planning effort. Not surprisingly, the president of one of the local teachers' associations cited the district's efforts to involve teachers as the primary reason why the Teacher Development program was working:

> We were involved all the way. It is true that mistakes have been made... and there is a need to be flexible, but the bottom line is that when teachers are being heard, success is possible.

A teacher candidate corroborated this statement:

> I watched the planning process closely. I just don't see how the whole developmental process could have had more teacher input.

During the planning and implementation phase, teachers saw their suggestions being acted upon. Observing district responsiveness first hand provided evidence that teacher input was being heard.

A second benefit accrues from teacher involvement in the planning and implementation of a peer evaluation system: expanding the sources of expertise within a school district. A thorough evaluation takes time, but given the large span of control facing most school administrators, it is out of the question to offer teachers anything beyond the minimum 2 or 3 classroom visits on which most final evaluations are based. Peer involvement in all three school districts eliminated this problem. It tapped sources of expertise within the district beyond administrators and supervisors.

In Sunnyside, peer remediators spend over 30 hours apiece working with the teacher assigned during the 60 day remediation period. A remediation team member assessed her role this way:

> I do believe that (the teacher) has the capacity to turn things around if she wants to. If she really wants to change, she can. She may not have gotten all the help she's needed in the past...Now, I've gotten her to enroll (in a special class). I got an agreement from the district that I could use all the substitute time I wanted, and that she could have a sub if she wanted to observe me.

The extensive assistance provided to teachers undergoing remediation far exceeds the assistance most principals report providing for less than effective teachers.

In Oceanview, instructional supervisors develop a close relationship with department members, given their proximity within the department. Thus, the evaluation of an instructional supervisor is based on much more extensive information than an evaluation provided by the principal. A high school teacher compared evaluation by the instructional supervisor to one done by an administrator in these terms:

> [Administrators] don't know who I am. Their evaluation would be a one-shot deal...But that's not true with the IS. He knows you. We have developed a relationship over a long period of time because we work together every day.

Because instructional supervisors do not evaluate more than 8 teachers in any given year, they are able to perform the task with greater care and attention than would be possible without this peer involvement. More importantly, instructional supervisors in Oceanview share curricular and subject matter knowledge with the teachers they evaluate--something that is often not the case when principals evaluate teachers. Thus, a 27 year veteran middle school teacher cited that it was "very

important" that he and his instructional supervisor shared the same background. When asked if the instructional supervisor demonstrated this knowledge in explicit ways, he stated:

> It is very explicit. It comes out in her comments. Just look in my folder. She couldn't say the things she says, and I wouldn't listen to her if she didn't.

In Midtown, a comparison of evaluation in the Teacher Development program to that traditionally performed in the district is striking. According to respondents, prior to Teacher Development, teachers rarely received more than 2 classroom observations in a year. Under Teacher Development, teachers now receive a minimum of 22 formal classroom observations. One provisional teacher reported receiving over 50 observations. District-wide observer/assessors combine with peer members of the teacher's advisory-evaluation team to account for a majority of these observations. Six different individuals--4 of them practicing teachers--participate in the evaluation of every teacher.

Without peer involvement, rigorous evaluation could never be coupled with extensive assistance. A high school principal candidly stated the benefits of peer involvement in this manner:

> In the past, any possibility that successful growth would occur in a teacher as a result of evaluation depended on a personal relationship that would exist between the principal and the teacher. The old system was relationship based. Now we have a professionally based system. Now, we involve teachers in the process.

A Teacher Candidate enthusiastically spoke of her relationship to her advisory-evaluation team and the help they provided:

> They have been my right arm. I couldn't have done what I've done without them...My chairperson has contributed so much. I feel badly using those people free of charge...Yesterday morning we had a meeting at 6:45 a.m.

Taken together, the three districts provide strong evidence supporting the importance of extensive teacher involvement in both the planning of a peer evaluation process, and, of course, its implementation. Teachers begin to see themselves as true professionals as depicted by Darling-Hammond (op. cit.). An additional benefit of teacher involvement is revealed in the following discussion of collegial relations and the impact of peer evaluation.

COLLEGIAL RELATIONS

When teachers evaluate their peers, regardless of the specific form of their involvement, collegial relations are affected. The three districts in this study suggest that successful peer evaluation systems match and adapt to the existing collegial relationships within a district. Each district arrived at a unique approach to peer evaluation through involvement of teachers, a careful study of alternatives, and the selection of a system that could work within the specific context of the school system.[4]

Sunnyside teachers and administrators worked closely with the superintendent of the Salt Lake City school district in deciding to adopt a peer remediation system. Yet visits to Salt Lake revealed the need for modifications. According to a teacher member of the visitation team:

> We saw some problems in Salt Lake City. They were putting people on remediation who had [been placed out of their area of expertise]. That's grossly unfair, and we were particularly tuned into those kinds of problems here because our enrollment started to decline. We knew that teachers would be forced to move around here.

Despite some reservations, Sunnyside teachers decided to forge ahead with the remediation plan after modifying the Salt Lake model. Planners carefully considered every modification in the district's teacher evaluation system. Teachers and administrators have weighed what changes would most likely succeed, given specific conditions. A perceived lack of expertise on the part of building principals in working with less than effective teachers opened the way to peer involvement in this aspect of evaluation. Other avenues of peer involvement (e.g., peer evaluation of effective teachers) have been rejected, given the experience level of the existing staff (avg--15 yrs), the extensive reorganizations that had just occurred, and the need to establish stability in peer relations in the district.

Few teachers I interviewed expressed any interest in expanding peer involvement in the evaluation system in Sunnyside. Thus, one veteran elementary school teacher, who had previously expressed enthusiastic support for the remediation program, had this to say about expanded peer involvement in evaluation:

> I think peer evaluation is the wrong way to look at it. Something like peer suggestions or peer sharing--now that's a good idea, but peer evaluations is a touchy issue. It sounds great as a philosophy, but when you try to put it in practice, day to day, inside a school, you're going to have teachers at each other's throats.

Peer involvement, limited to formal remediation, meets the needs of the Sunnyside school district.

Oceanview similarly demonstrates the importance of making careful decisions regarding the extent of peer involvement in the evaluation process. Teachers and district administrators made a conscious decision to limit peer involvement in evaluation to the

secondary level, where the role of instructional supervisor had a longstanding acceptance among teachers[5]. Charging instructional supervisors with evaluative responsibilities represented a natural extension of past practices. Roles similar to instructional supervisors have never existed at the elementary level. Thus, the principal continues to evaluate teachers in elementary schools, rather than risk negative fallout from a change in collegial relations that might result if peer evaluation were to be imposed.

The following statements from Oceanview secondary teachers reveal the overwhelming acceptance of instructional supervisors as peer evaluators:

> (From a third year high school science teacher)
> I feel strongly about how important it is that [the instructional supervisor] knows me so well....We talk about specific subject matter items all the time....He knows me, he hired me, he evaluates me. If I don't feel good about something I'm doing in the classroom, if I need help, I go to him, not the principal.
>
> (From a 20 year veteran high school English teacher)
> My evaluations are more valuable because they are done by the Instructional Supervisor. We see each other daily....We have more constant contact. We constantly share information. We come in contact in both formal and informal settings. He knows me...And the fact that he remains a teacher....is very important.

Both of the individuals quoted above worked in a department where at least one teacher had received a less than satisfactory rating in the last two years. The summative aspect of evaluations has apparently not affected the acceptance of peer evaluators. Peer evaluation has become a taken for granted aspect of collegial relations in Oceanview's secondary schools. As one young teacher naively put it, "I can't imagine having an evaluation system that operated any other way."

Despite the enthusiastic acceptance of instructional supervisors at the secondary level, teachers of Oceanview's elementary schools want no part of peer evaluation. A third year teacher in a school with a reputation for good collegial relations stated bluntly, "I am not comfortable with teachers evaluating teachers. Not in this school. We differ in style too much." A veteran sixth grade teacher in another school stated:

> I just don't think teachers evaluating teachers, especially in elementary schools, is a good idea....That could be threatening. Teachers evaluating teachers is a threatening situation.

Taken together, these comments reveal that collegial relations differ considerably from the elementary to the secondary level. Currently, no plans exist within the district to expand peer evaluation to the elementary level.

In Midtown, interviews reveal that the radical revision in the evaluation system that serves as the cornerstone of the Teacher Development program was possible for two reasons relating directly to collegial relations. First, a "culture" for risk taking and experimentation within Midtown represents a key ingredient for the success of the peer evaluation program. Teachers and building administrators alike are trusting of top management within the district to follow through on promises and make the system work. Over a decade ago, Midtown took the lead among the nations school districts in bringing about school desegregation. A few years later, the district led the way in establishing a model staff development program for teachers. Teacher Development has merely been the latest in a series of innovations within the district. Thus, teachers have been

accepting of the process. According to one district official:

> Accidental inventions more frequently occur in well-prepared labs. Midtown's lab is well prepared and ready to embrace invention....This system is an innovative system and a successful system. It has a history of success.

A second important reason for the success of peer evaluation within Midtown revolves around the critical decision to phase in the program slowly. Only volunteers from the ranks of experienced teachers participate, along with all new teachers. Obviously, a great deal of skepticism exists among veteran teachers. This staged implementation plan allows them to "wait and see" before choosing to participate. Existing norms of interaction are allowed to remain along with innovative changes. Though some "professional jealousy" has been observed within some staffs--animosity between those volunteers randomly selected to participate in the first year of the teacher development program and those unable or unwilling to participate--collegial relations as a whole within the district remain positive.

A final consideration that must be addressed regarding collegial relations and the impact of peer evaluation focuses on the peer evaluators themselves. Within all three districts, peer evaluators find themselves under tremendous role strain in performing their evaluative duties. As both peer and evaluator, different roles become dominant at different times.

A common solution to role strain and role conflict emerged among peer evaluators in all three school districts. A high level of professionalism exhibited itself among all peer evaluators. All acknowledged the difficult position they

occupied in relation to their peers, but they also pursued solutions to this problem as a matter of professional responsibility. Maintaining positive peer relations remained an important goal. Thus, an instructional supervisor in Oceanview described how he dealt with potential role conflict:

> It is a dual role--a tightrope to walk. But my department understands that if it wasn't me that was evaluating, it would have to be a non-subject matter specialist....This results in a high degree of cooperation.

Another IS manages her potential role conflict by "not polarizing anyone, listening to what teachers say, not being a dictator, and respecting teachers' potential contributions."

In Midtown, observer-assessors see "establishing our credibility as valid and reliable observers" as a key to dealing with potential role conflict, followed closely by "establishing a trusting relationship with teachers that we will do a good job." By maintaining high standards of professionalism, observer-assessors felt that they achieved the respect of their peers. An additional key for observer-assessors in managing role conflict with peers focused on the support they received from district management. This leads us to the final theme that emerged from the three districts under study.

BLENDING BUREAUCRATIC AND PROFESSIONAL AUTHORITY

Evaluation is not routinely seen as a professional activity. Evaluation occurs within organizations as a tool to motivate and direct individual behavior in pursuit of organizational goals (Dornbusch & Scott, 1975). Administrators exercise authority as empowered by state law and organizational rules. Legislative and management controls undergird the exercise of bureaucratic

authority in schools.

On the other hand, involving teachers in the setting of evaluative standards, in the design of the evaluation process, and in the assessment of individual performance, signals professional status. Professional structure assumes the commitment of the practitioner to a service ethic and to the collegial body of professionals which extends beyond the boundaries of the organization (Benson, 1973). Professional expertise stands as the bedrock on which professionals exercise authority.

To **evaluate** teachers as **professionals** becomes an exercise in blending professional and bureaucratic conceptions of authority. Conflict is not inevitable; rather, new forms of organizing are required. Thus, each district has taken specific steps to blend professional controls with traditional bureaucratic controls (See Peterson, 1984) in designing its teacher evaluation system.

Sunnyside's teachers see peer involvement in remediation as a professional responsibility. However, only administrators can initiate the remediation process. Building principals must rate a teacher as less than satisfactory for one year, and document efforts to help the teacher improve before a referral for formal remediation will be accepted. Sole responsibility for monitoring professional practice within the district does not fall to teachers. In fact, identification of incompetence remains an administrative responsibility. Blending professional and bureaucratic controls in this manner has kept the evaluation system manageable, though it has also presented some problems.

Several respondents felt as though building administrators have been shirking their responsibility in identifying less than effective teachers. As a result, incompetent teachers remain in the classroom. A district administrator stated:

> Principals always seem to be the weak link in the system....The remediation program is really waning now--this year we only had one teacher placed on remediation, and I feel that there should have been more. I don't think we've given enough attention to it lately.

A remediation specialist felt that any impact she might have on a teacher was minimized because of inaction on the part of administrators:

> Principals just wait too long [before referring a teacher for remediation]....A poor teacher gets to be too poor for too long before they're finally referred....This teacher is so poor--so far off the mark--she needs total retraining.

The critical importance of effectively merging bureaucratic and professional authority effectively stands out in the experience of Sunnyside. Merging the two is both the secret to past successes and the cause of current problems. The superintendent has publicly gone on record that evaluation will once again be an active priority for building administrators. Until that occurs, teachers will be unable to exercise professional control.

The blending of bureaucratic and professional authority has taken on a very different form in Oceanview. The district approximates a professional model of control at the secondary level. Instructional supervisors are selected from their peers in consultation with the principal. They share curricular and subject matter expertise with their staff.

However, few teachers received less than satisfactory

ratings when instructional supervisors first became evaluators. All evaluations looked alike, despite other evidence--parent complaints, student evaluations--that suggested expertise levels varied. Thus, the superintendent formed the Evaluation Management Committee to oversee evaluation activity in the district. Each instructional supervisor must now discuss the evaluations of his peers twice each year with the district-wide steering committee. All ratings must be rigorously documented. Instructional supervisors are evaluated on the quality of their written evaluations of teachers.

The formation of the Evaluation Management Committee represents an infusion of a bureaucratic control mechanism that works in conjunction with the professional controls of the instructional supervisor. Because pressure is brought to bear on instructional supervisors, written evaluations now distinguish between excellent and less than effective teachers. The use of formal sanctions has increased. An administrator assessed the impact of the Evaluation Management Committee in these terms:

> Many instructional supervisors would probably not have sustained their efforts in doing evaluations as they have now, because it is a painful process and it demands a lot of time....and if you take the pressure off, its not going to work. When district administrators review the evaluations on a yearly basis as we do, results are different and difficult decisions get made.

Blending bureaucratic with professional controls presents problems, however. Several instructional supervisors reported feeling pressured to provide negative ratings to teachers. One supervisor described his meeting with the committee as "a sweaty palms affair where paranoia set in." Another felt the purpose of

the committee was to "blacklist" teachers. District administrators acknowledged that problems sometimes resulted when communicating with instructional supervisors. An air of tension hangs over the Evaluation Management Committee's meetings as professional and bureaucratic worlds merge.

Despite this tension, every instructional supervisor acknowledged the need for an Evaluation Management Committee as a mechanism to "keep us on our toes." An instructional supervisor related the following story that demonstrated the check and balance that is possible when the system functions properly:

> I battled [with the Evaluation Management Committee] for the autonomy to work with a marginal teacher in my department--for the right to make him a better teacher. I felt that he had to be given to opportunity to improve. The cabinet wanted more drastic action, but I made my case....I had to give it a crack.

Finally, Midtown demonstrates the most elaborate mechanism for blending bureaucratic and professional authority among the three sample districts. I have already described the professional nature of peer involvement in evaluating teachers in Midtown. Practicing teachers were full partners in the setting of professional standards and in the monitoring of professional practice as part of the Teacher Development program.

Professional controls are entwined with bureaucratic controls in several ways. The result is a set of checks and balances involving teachers and administrators that seek to infuse the entire process with reliability and validity. First, at the school site level, two administrators--the principal and the assistant principal for instruction--are charged with directing the activities of the advisory-evaluation team.

Observations and judgments of this team are subject to validation by district-wide observer-assessors. Discrepancies must be addressed. All Focused Growth Plans submitted by teachers are reviewed by a district-wide committee, and returned for revision. In addition, all summative ratings provided by school based teams are reviewed by committees of teachers and administrators at the region and district level. The complex system that results entwines bureaucratic and professional controls within the school district. The statements below from individuals at all levels of the district indicate that this notion of bureaucratic and professional checks and balances has been effectively communicated through the system:

> (From a district-level administrator)
> Observer-assessors serve the need of evaluating the evaluations produced at the school site level. They serve as external validators of principal and assistant principal for instruction evaluation reports...They serve a key role.

> (From an observer-assessor)
> The area review committees are a critical part of the evaluation process because the advisory-evaluation teams have to defend the summative judgments they make based on the data in the reports that will be reviewed by the area committee. We give data. We don't evaluate.

> (From a building administrator)
> The observer-assessors serve as a check of teachers' jobs here at the school. They hold us accountable. As API, I read over all the observer-assessor reports and work with the teachers based on their comments.

> (From a provisional teacher)
> I think the observer-assessors are almost unnecessary because the advisory-evaluation team makes the final ultimate decision. I guess the observer-assessor is a check. This is the role they serve.

Each school district has uniquely blended bureaucratic and professional authority in a manner that matches local conditions. Maintaining the proper balance between organizational and

collegial controls is difficult. The resulting tension necessitates constant fine-tuning to ensure that evaluation brings about the desired outcome.

SUMMARY

The three districts selected for study each offered a different model of peer involvement in the teacher evaluation process. Despite the differences in form and length of implementation, three themes emerged to assist in analyzing their experience:

- Extensive teacher involvement, in both the design and implementation of any peer evaluation system, is critical. It symbolizes teachers' professional status and secures commitment. More importantly, teacher involvement addresses the span of control problem facing all teacher evaluation systems and maximizes the sources of expertise within the district.
- Collegial relations among teachers within a district represent a starting point for planning peer involvement in the evaluation process. Districts must make strategic decisions regarding the extent and form of peer involvement based on past experience. Each district limited its application of peer involvement based on such an analysis. Though role conflict for peer evaluators is an inevitable by-product of peer involvement, sensitivity to these concerns can forge workable solutions.
- Peer involvement in evaluation must be merged with bureaucratic controls within a district if valid summative judgments are to result. Professional and bureaucratic controls can serve as a check and a balance that enables teachers to trust the validity of the personnel decisions that result. The tension that emerges must constantly be monitored to ensure that a proper balance is maintained.

LIMITATIONS

The findings presented here are exploratory in nature. No control districts have been studied to verify the robustness of the findings. The personnel actions taken by the districts may

have occurred without any peer involvement. The data is persuasive, however, that it is possible to address less than effective teaching through peer involvement. Further research is necessary to address issues of causality.

All data is self-reported. Interviews represented teachers' perceptions of evaluation practices. I did no direct observation of peers engaged in evaluative activities (though I did review samples of observation and evaluation reports prepared by peer evaluators). I am unable to determine if teachers' perceptions accurately reflect the operation of peer involvement in the evaluation process. Nor am I able to make any judgment regarding the quality of instruction in the district as a result of the teacher evaluation system.

Despite these limitations, the sample districts offer intriguing possibilities for districts interested in exploring peer evaluation strategies. In addition, further research might focus on the issues presented here--teacher involvement, collegial relations, and the blending of bureaucratic and professional controls--to generate hypotheses for further testing and development.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Several encouraging lessons emerge from this research that should guide policy makers and district administrators as they explore peer involvement strategies in the evaluation process. Most importantly, the experience of these districts demonstrates that peers can become meaningfully involved in evaluation while maintaining teacher support and commitment to the process.

Teachers enthusiastically embraced peer involvement in the evaluation process in all three districts. They view it as a professional responsibility. When the critical element of teacher involvement in the planning and implementation of any evaluation system--from start to finish--is met, teachers want to exercise professional control.

This research suggests that the local level represents the proper unit of analysis for both research and experimentation. These three districts adapted peer involvement to unique circumstances. Respondents indicated over and over again that the systems in place in other districts would probably meet with resistance and failure if attempted in their own district. Adapting, modifying, and matching a peer evaluation process to local norms is a necessary ingredient for success. Existing conditions must serve as a starting point for reform. Thus, peer involvement in evaluation may not be an appropriate reform strategy in every district. Other steps may need to precede such an initiative.

Finally, this research suggests that strong administrative leadership is essential to making peer evaluation work. Strong superintendents, central office personnel, and building administrators must take the lead in supporting and encouraging teachers in their quest for professional status. Teachers will be unwilling to shoulder the additional burden of peer review--with all of its pitfalls--unless it is clear that district managers will support them, fight for resources, and push teachers to make difficult decisions. In both Sunnyside and Oceanview, teachers continually stood ready to occupy the role of

peer evaluator. It rested on administrators to make teacher evaluation an active priority that they were willing to pursue before meaningful evaluation outcomes resulted.

FOOTNOTES

1 A similar methodology has been employed in several recent studies of teacher evaluation (See Wise, et al, op. cit.; McLaughlin and Pfeifer, forthcoming).

2 The focus of research in this large urban district was the group of teachers participating in the first year of a district-wide Career Development program. All new teachers (approximately 350) participated, along with 150 volunteers from the ranks of experienced teachers. The sampling of respondents is thus comparable with that in the other two districts, if only participants in the career development program are considered.

3 The role of assistant principal for instruction has a long history in the Midtown schools. Several years ago, all schools had a position designated as "coordinating teacher." This individual was not an administrator, and worked with teachers to improve instruction by brokering staff development resources. As time passed, this position was upgraded to an administrative position, entitled assistant principal for instruction. All of these individuals have demonstrated their expertise as classroom instructors.

4 The Rand study of effective teacher evaluation practices (Wise et al, op. cit) identified a related point. One of the major conclusions was that to succeed, a teacher evaluation system must suit the educational goals, management style, conception of teaching, and community values of the school district. The three districts in this study suggest that successful peer evaluation strategies must match not only management goals and philosophies, but existing collegial relations as well.

5 Department heads at the secondary level were originally called "curriculum associates" prior to state legislation that required teacher evaluation. These individuals performed a variety of functions falling under the general category of instructional leadership. When teacher evaluation was mandated by the state, these individuals took on this additional responsibility, and became known as instructional supervisors.

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